

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED before the

RIGHT HONOURABLE

T H E

LORD MAYOR,
ALDERMEN,

A N D

Citizens of *LONDON*,

November 5, 1750.



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SERMON

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ALDermen,



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Citizens of L O N D O N,

November 5, 1750.

By *WILLIAM COKAYNE*, M. A. DD

Fellow of *St. John's College, Oxford*, one of the Proctors
of that University, and Chaplain to the Right
Honourable the LORD MAYOR.

L O N D O N :

Printed for W. MEADOWS, at the *Angel* in Cornhill.
M D C C L I.

Cokayne, Mayor.

*The first Court held on Tuesday the
6th Day of November, 1750.
and in the Twenty-fourth Year
of the Reign of King GEORGE
the Second, of Great-Britain, &c.*

IT is Ordered, That the Thanks of this Court be given to the Reverend Mr. *Cokayne*, Chaplain to the Right Honourable the LORD MAYOR, for his Sermon preached before this Court, and the Liveries of the several Companies of this City, at the Cathedral Church of *St. Paul's*, on *Monday* the Fifth Instant, and that he be desired to print the same.

M A N



TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
Francis Cokayne, Esq;
LORD MAYOR,
THE
ALDERMEN,
AND
Citizens of LONDON;
THIS
SERMON
IS,

With all due Respect,
DEDICATED

*By their most Obedient and
Obliged Humble Servant,*

WILLIAM COKAYNE.

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WILLIAM COKAYNE.

ACTS xvii. 22, latter Part.

*Ye Men of Athens, I perceive that in
all Things ye are too superstitious.*

IT hath been long and justly observed, that the best Things are most liable to Abuse, and when abused, become the worst. There is nothing so excellent in itself, which may not degenerate into its opposite Extreme, and create as much Horror and Dislike, as it once did Love and Admiration. What was before good and salutary, shall, by some unhappy Alteration in its Nature, terminate in Something nauseous and hurtful, and Objects at first lovely and attractive, be converted into loathsome Deformity. In the *Moral* World, Disorders of this Kind are perceived often, and felt severely; so as to disturb the Peace, and endanger the Happiness of Mankind. Mens Interests, or Passions, are not only continually at war with their Reason, but frequently get uppermost in the Contest, and the natural and necessary Consequence thereof is, Confusion, and every evil Work. There cannot, perhaps, be given a more remarkable (nor indeed a more melancholy) Proof of this, than what hath sometimes happened

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pened with respect to Religion, which though it be a Matter of the greatest Weight and Moment, the Basis of all private and publick Good, the Source of present, and Earnest of future Blessings, yet have there not been wanting those, in almost all Ages and Countries, who, prompted by some evil Motive or other, have impiously presumed to counteract its gracious Designs, and thereby rendered it, in some Measure at least, destructive of those great and noble Ends, which it was intended always to promote. Her Form had, at certain Periods, well-nigh lost all its Original Brightness; Clouds and Darkness hung over it, and intercepted that Light which was sent from Heaven to guide our Feet in the Paths of Righteousness and Peace: Infomuch, that no truly good and pious Man, acted by a right Fear of God, and Love towards his Neighbour, could, upon beholding such gross and scandalous Enormities, forbear condemning them, or exclaiming, as the Apostle doth in the Text, *I perceive that in all Things ye are too superstitious.* In my farther Discourse upon which Words, I shall,

First, Consider the Nature of Superstition.

Next, Shew the Evil Tendency thereof, more particularly, with regard to the Occasion of the present Solemnity. And,

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Lastly,

Lastly, Propose a few Rules and Cautions by way of Preservatives against it.

Now Superstition, in its general and more commonly received Acceptation, signifies little else than to worship God after a Manner offensive and displeasing to him. It is founded in an extravagant Zeal for, and violent Attachment to, the external Parts of Religious Worship, arising from a vain ill-grounded Fear of the Deity, and Misapprehension of his Nature and Attributes. It is a Religion not warranted by Reason, absurd in Speculation, and troublesome in Practice. That Kind of Superstition, which proposes to itself a *false* Object of Adoration, falls more properly under the Notion of Idolatry, and needs not therefore be enlarged upon before a Christian Audience. What is principally intended by it here is, an undue Way of worshipping the *true* God. The great End indeed and Design which it has in View, is, *pleasing God*, but it takes its Rise withal from an erroneous Judgment, in supposing that to be *pleasing to God*, which in reality is not so. It were endless to enumerate the several Particulars whereof this dangerous Error in Religion consists, or to trace it in all its odious Shapes and Qualities. I shall content myself with taking notice of those censured by the Apostle
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in another Place, to wit, Will-worship, Humility, and Bodily-Mortification, which (saith he) have indeed a Shew of Wisdom, that is, the Face and Semblance, but not the Power and Spirit of Religion: And that, because their Will-worship consisted in such an Eagerness and violent Propensity to appear more than ordinarily religious, and to do what was acceptable to God, as out-ran their Reason, and transported them beyond the Bounds of Sobriety, so as not to leave them Room to consider what was required by Him as a Duty, and what not; nay, to betray them, perhaps, into what was forbidden as a Sin. Again, because their Humility and Bodily Neglect were affected, arrogant, and ridiculous. They pretended to a superior Skill and Knowledge in Religious Matters, and of what was most pleasing to God; so that there was, 'tis true, a great *outward Appearance* of Meekness and Self-Denial, but *within* nothing but Haughtiness and Vanity. While they strove to exceed others in the external Shews and Forms of Humility and Bodily-Neglect, they exposed themselves to the Temptation, and actually incurred the Guilt, of Spiritual Pride, that is, an over-weening Opinion of themselves, and Contempt of others, discovering itself by an invincible Obstinacy in defending their own Notions, and Modes of Worship, accom-

accompanied with a Forwardness to impose them on all, and Impatience of Contradiction from any. Because farther, they placed the Sum and Substance of Religion in Things too weak and unable to support it, in Meats, Drinks, and the like ; whereas the Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Spirit : We having been told, that not that which goeth into the Mouth, but that which cometh out, defileth the Man. --- *Lastly*, Because they flattered themselves, that to follow their own Inventions, was more pleasing to God, than the Observance of his Commands. This seems to have been their greatest Mistake, and Parent of all the rest ; they fondly imagined that they had found out Ways of Worship much more acceptable to the Deity, than what were in common Repute and Practice ; and those depended on some favourite Rules and Ceremonies of their own ; in making no small Part of their Religion to consist in forbearing some Things, and doing others, which the wise Author of our Being never required, nor the Christian Church considered as Parts of her Religious Doctrines or Practices. In short, the great and good God is hereby represented as either expecting, or

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accepting of, mere outward Forms and Ceremonies, whether commanded by him, or not; chiefly solicitous for the Performance alone, with little or no Concern for the internal Frame, or Temper of Soul, with which it ought always to be attended, and without which it is an useless and lifeless Performance; preferring Sacrifice to Mercy, Shadows to Substance, the Form of Godliness to its Power. His Creatures, in the mean Time, are tied down to the Observance of Things which are evidently not authorized by him, and which answer either no Purpose at all in Religion, or else a very ill one. They are more afraid of omitting a *Circumstance* in Religion, than an *essential Duty*, and for what is trifling in Comparison, abandon real intrinsick Goodness.

I proceed, *Secondly*, To shew the evil Tendency of this Error. It tends to weaken and undermine the Foundation of true Piety. The Nature of Piety consists in a firm Belief, and worthy Conception of the Divine Being, his Perfections, and Providence, and in so accustoming ourselves to the Consideration of these, as will excite correspondent Affections in the Soul, and form us to a Resemblance of his

Moral Perfections, and a ready and constant Obedience to his Will. Whereas, Superstition entertains wrong and unworthy Notions of God and his Attributes, and endeavours to please him, not by an habitual Veneration and Gratitude, nor Imitation of his Justice and Goodness, but by servile Flatteries, laborious, costly, and painful Services, voluntary Penances, and Austerities exercised both on themselves and others. It thwarts and opposes Virtue, instead of promoting it; in as much as it demands Assent to the Practice of Doctrines very different from hers, and productive of Evil; alienating the Minds of those who are unhappily influenced by them from the Spiritual Parts of Religion, and fixing their Attention so closely on the external Rites and little Observances thereof, as not to suffer them to improve in real Goodness, or to put in practice the more weighty and necessary Duties of the Christian Life. What shall I say more? It leads Men to do Things under Pretence of Religion, which are directly contrary to it: For the Truth whereof, I need only appeal to the Horrid Conspiracy of this Day, which how speciously soever it may have been argued by Popish Apologists to have been the Project only of a few Male-con-

tents, yet cannot be denied to have owed its Rise to the Principles of their most corrupt Religion. For never did Zeal break forth into more furious Exorbitancies, never was the Spirit of Resentment carried higher, never were the Laws of God and Man more openly and avowedly insulted, than in that execrable Plot, and intended Massacre. And indeed, what less could be expected from Men, who, under the Mask of Religion, excuse and countenance the grossest Errors, and most shameful Corruptions; whose Doctrine is, that Allegiance promised, or given with the greater Solemnity of an Oath, to Protestant Princes (by them termed Hereticks and Enemies) is of no Force or Obligation; whose Practices are consonant thereto, in endeavouring to sanctify Perjury, Treason, Murder?

I come now, *Thirdly*, To propose a few Rules and Cautions by Way of Preservatives against this pernicious Error of Superstition. Those dreadful Effects of it which shewed themselves in the intended Mischief of this Day, are alone a sufficient Caution, and will, if duly attended to, teach us to arm ourselves against that furious Spirit and intemperate Zeal, which drives Men on to do Things for Religion, that are altogether
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contrary to it. Had we only the lesser Follies and Absurdities of Superstition to complain of, it were, even in that Case, well worth the Care and Foresight of a Nation to guard, and use all possible Means of Security, against it; but, when we consider farther, that there is a peculiar Malignity in all Superstition upon the Welfare of Society, and the Safety of States and Communities; and that nothing sooner stirs up a People to Sedition, Disloyalty, and Disobedience to Government, than a misguided Warmth and blind Rage flowing from Superstitious Apprehensions, there seems to lie a yet greater Obligation on Rulers to put a Stop to this Malady in Religion, which is so apt to break out into that worst Plague of Government, a Rebellion upon Pretence of Conscience.

A *Second* Rule or Caution is, That we fix *true* Notions of God and Religion in our Minds. He who doth so (and all ought) will not dwell much or long on Forms and Usages, but regard principally the Innocency, Integrity, and Holiness of his Life; will not place his Religion in espousing or opposing any particular Modes or Ceremonies of Worship, but in a good Heart, in an excellent Temper of Mind, such as is said to adorn the Doctrine of Christ in all Things, holy, spiritual,

spiritual, calm, peaceable, charitable, and in Actions suitable to this Temper.

A *Third* Rule is, That we set not an equal Value on Things only relatively and accidentally good, with such as are essentially and in their own Natures so. For the first of these are, as it were, but the Instruments and external Aids of Religion; the other are the proper Duties of it. These are they which Christ himself hath stiled *the weightier Matters of the Law*, in contradic~~tion~~^{tion} to those inferior Duties. These are the constant Subjects of his Sermons, Parables, and Discourses upon all Occasions. These are the Things by which he is desirous his Disciples should always distinguish themselves, above all others: Upon these he puts the Issue of our Trial at the Day of Judgment. And these are the Duties most frequently and earnestly pressed upon by all the Writers of the New Covenant.

The *Fourth* and last Caution I shall give, is, That we judge of Mens Pretences to Piety and Goodness, not by their outward Shew and Appearance, but by the Spirit and Temper of Soul that goes along with them. This was the Method the great Apostle himself took to inform and direct

rect his own Judgment. He regarded not their affected Humility and Sanctity, their nice and scrupulous Observance of Seasons, their Ostentation, and pretended extraordinary Merits, but traced them up higher, and there found nothing but Spiritual Pride and Vanity. It is indeed highly wrong, and criminal, to judge rashly concerning these Things; but when the Case is plain, and carries with it its own Condemnation, when we see great Insolence, Contempt and Malice towards all who differ from them, or, in any Shape, oppose them, we may safely conclude, that such Religion, in whom or in what Church soever it is to be found, cannot have *descended from above*, but is *earthly, sensual, devilish*.

And now, if our Religion, Liberty, Lives, and Fortunes, be Things too dear and valuable to be cheaply and easily parted with, then ought we with all Humility and Gratitude to offer up our Thanks and Praises at the Throne of God for all his Mercies vouchsafed unto us, more particularly, for his providential Interposition when we were so near being *swallowed up in the deep Waters of the Proud*, for his most gracious and signal Deliverance of his Church and People from the heavy and galling Load of Tyranny and Superstition,
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designed as on this Day to have been imposed on us, and our latest Posterity. *Lastly*, As we cannot but by this Time be truly sensible of the fatal Consequences of Superstition, and furnished (I hope) with proper Arguments against it, so doth it behove us to take especial care not to run into the opposite Extreme, Profaneness. Extremes naturally lead to each other. True Piety is the golden Mean betwixt both, our great and only Security against Superstition on one Hand, and Impiety on the other. Let us then neither suffer the holy Flame of Devotion to grow cold and languid in our Breasts, nor yet heat and inflame it till it break out into a consuming Fire. Let us so conduct ourselves in all our Religious Concerns, as to shew we are neither forgetful of the past, nor unworthy of God's future Mercies. And as a Proof of this, let us adhere firmly to the Principles of our Religion, that reformed Part of it planted in these Kingdoms, and endeavour to conform our Lives and Conversations to those Principles, by loving and fearing God, by keeping alive in our Minds an hearty Sense of his perpetual Goodness to, and Care over us, by trusting in him, depending upon him, and acknowledging him in all our Ways. Finally, Let it be our great Aim to be pure and blameless through
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the whole Course of our Christian Warfare here on Earth, avoiding Sin and Pollution, and exercising ourselves in every heavenly Grace and Virtue; above all, in that which is the Bond and Perfection of every other Virtue, Brotherly Love and Charity, so as to have a *Conscience void of Offence*, to practise Truth and Justice in all our Dealings, *to live peaceably, if possible, with all Men*, and to promote, in our respective Stations and Callings, Good-will, Unity, and Concord amongst the whole Race of Mankind.

F I N I S.

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